

AMENDMENTS TO THE CLAIMS:

This listing of claims will replace all prior versions, and listings of claims in the application:

LISTING OF CLAIMS:

1-33. (cancelled)

34. (currently amended) A mold ~~(10)~~ for fabricating a silica-based preform intended to be sintered,

said mold is adapted to receive a slurry based on amorphous silica powder and a liquid and comprises an interior portion ~~(14)~~ and an exterior portion ~~(12)~~ adapted to delimit a wall ~~(38)~~ of said preform, at least in an area delimiting a usable portion of said wall ~~(38)~~, ~~only one of said interior portion (14) and said exterior portion (12), called the "permeable portion" (14),~~ being permeable to said liquid,

wherein, in at least one area delimiting a usable portion of said wall, said interior portion is deformable and has sufficient inherent stiffness to delimit one wall of the preform when slurry is cast into the mold, said interior portion, ~~which is called the "impermeable portion",~~ is not permeable to said liquid and comprises

a liner ~~(30)~~ whose exterior face is impermeable and which is sufficiently flexible to accompany the modification of the dimensions of the piece forming within the

mold ~~(10)~~, and

a support ~~(31)~~ of said liner, in contact with the interior face of said liner, and made of a ~~stiff~~ material, ~~which is designed~~ rigid enough to support the liner ~~(30)~~ and so as to prevent the slurry from causing the liner to collapse before the ~~latter~~ slurry has set.

35. (previously presented) The mold according to claim 34, wherein, in said area delimiting a usable portion of said wall, the distance between said interior portion and said exterior portion is substantially constant.

36. (currently amended) The mold according to claim 35, wherein, the distance between said interior portion ~~(14)~~ and said exterior portion ~~(12)~~ is less than 10 cm, or is less than 5 cm.

37. (currently amended) The mold according to claim 34, wherein said permeable portion ~~(12)~~ is made of a material absorbing said liquid in a similar manner to plaster.

38. (currently amended) The mold according to claim 34, wherein said liner ~~(30)~~ is deformable as a result of a modification of the dimensions of said preform during its fabrication.

39. (currently amended) The mold according to claim 38, wherein said liner ~~(30)~~ is configured to be removed or peeled toward the interior of said preform avoiding all contact with said preform.

40. (currently amended) The mold according to claim 38, wherein said liner ~~(30)~~ is sufficiently deformable to allow forcible passage of a protuberance of said preform having a height less than or equal to 1.1 times the thickness of said liner ~~(30)~~ during the removal of said preform from the mold.

41. (currently amended) The mold according to claim 38, wherein said liner ~~(30)~~ is made of a material that is inert with respect to said slurry.

42. (currently amended) The mold according to claim 40, wherein said liner does not adhere to said preform or may be unstuck from said preform by deformation of said liner ~~(30)~~ during removal from the mold.

43. (currently amended) The mold according to claim 38, wherein said liner ~~(30)~~ is made of silicone or a cellular material.

44. (currently amended) The mold according to claim 38, wherein said liner ~~(30)~~ includes air injection holes ~~(34)~~.

45. (cancelled)

46. (withdrawn) Method of fabricating a sintered silica part, comprising the following steps:

a) casting a slurry based on amorphous silica powder and a liquid between an interior portion (14) and an exterior portion (12) of a mold (10) according to claim 34 to delimit a wall (38) of said part (40),

b) at least partially evacuating said liquid to obtain a preform,

c) removing said preform from the mold to obtain a green part,

d) further drying said green part,

e) sintering said green part,

wherein, in the step b), in at least one area delimiting a usable portion of said wall (38), said liquid is evacuated through one only of said interior portion (14) and said exterior portion (12) of said mold (10), called the "permeable portion" (12), the other portion being called the "impermeable portion" (14).

47. (withdrawn) Method according to claim 46, wherein, prior to the step e), a coating material is applied to said green part.

48. (withdrawn) Method according to claim 47, wherein said coating material is a precursor of silicon nitride (Si_3N_4).

49. (withdrawn) Method according to claim 46, wherein, during the step b), feeding of said mold (10) with slurry continues to compensate the evacuation of said liquid.

50. (withdrawn) Method according to claim 46, wherein, during the step b), to encourage the elimination of bubbles in said slurry, a reduced pressure is maintained in the container that contains the slurry before casting and/or independently in said mold.

51. (withdrawn) Method according to claim 46, wherein, said mold (10), during the step c) of removal of the mold, said support (31) and said liner (30) are separated from said preform independently of each other.

52. (withdrawn) Method according to claim 46, wherein said slurry contains a powder based on amorphous

silica mixed with a solvent, the particle size range of said powder conforming to the Füller-Bolomey law.

53. (withdrawn) Method according to claim 52, wherein said powder contains a mixture of at least two amorphous silica powders.

54. (withdrawn) Method according to claim 52, wherein said powder contains only particles whose size is from 0.1 to 620 μm .

55. (withdrawn) Method according to claim 52, wherein said powder includes only particles whose size is from 0.2 to 200 μm .

56. (withdrawn) Method according to claim 52, wherein said slurry contains more than 85% of dry material.

57. (withdrawn) Method according to claim 52, wherein said slurry has a viscosity from 1 to 30 Poises at the beginning of the casting step a).

58. (withdrawn) Method according to claim 52, wherein the dry fraction of said slurry contains more than 99.5% silica.

59. (withdrawn) Method according to claim 52, wherein said silica powder has a specific surface area from 0.01 to 20 m²/g.

60. (withdrawn) Method according to claim 52, wherein said liquid is water.

61. (withdrawn) Method according to claim 52, wherein it includes a step of casting under pressure.

62. (withdrawn) Green part fabricated by the steps a) to c) of a method according to claim 46 and therefore having no divergence front, which has a three-point bending strength from 2 to 10 MPa.

63-66. (cancelled)

67. (withdrawn) A method of fabricating a sintered silica part, comprising the following steps:

(a) casting a slurry based on amorphous silica powder and a liquid, in a mold (10) for fabricating a preform, said mold having an interior portion (14) and an exterior portion (12) adapted to delimit a wall (38) of said preform, at least in an area delimiting a usable portion of said wall (38), only one of said interior portion (14) and exterior

portion (12), called the "permeable portion" (14), being permeable to said liquid,

(b) at least partially evacuating said liquid to obtain a preform, said liquid being evacuated, in at least said area delimiting a usable portion of said wall (38), only through the "permeable portion",

(c) removing said preform from the mold to obtain a green part,

(d) further drying said green part, and

(e) sintering said green part,

wherein, prior to the step (e), a coating material is applied to said green part, said coating material being a precursor of silicon nitride (Si_3N_4).

68. (withdrawn) A method of fabricating a sintered silica part, comprising the following steps:

(a) casting a slurry based on amorphous silica powder and a liquid, in a mold (10) for fabricating a preform, said mold having an interior portion (14) and an exterior portion (12) adapted to delimit a wall (38) of said preform, at least in an area delimiting a usable portion of said wall (38), only one of said interior portion (14) and exterior portion (12), called the "permeable portion" (14), being permeable to said liquid,

(b) at least partially evacuating said liquid to

obtain a preform, said liquid being evacuated, in at least said area delimiting a usable portion of said wall (38), only through the "permeable portion",

(c) removing said preform from the mold to obtain a green part,

(d) further drying said green part, and

(e) sintering said green part,

wherein, particle size range of said amorphous silica powder conforms to the Füller-Bolomey law, said powder having a compactness index below 500.

69. (new) The mold according to claim 34, wherein said at least one area delimiting a usable portion of said wall of said perform delimits the whole usable portion of said wall.

70. (new) The mold according to claim 34, wherein said liner is not stuck to the support, so that said support is removable independently of said liner.